


CANADIAN LABOUR HISTORY

Quebec during the War of 1812, existed to profit from labour scarcity. Others, such as the Montreal shoemakers or the Toronto printers of the 1830's, reflected the concern of skilled workers to protect their craft and status from being undermined. A persistent common factor was the creation of a benevolent fraternity against the disasters of unemployment, illness and a pauper's funeral. Yet, as many early labour historians indicate, the benefits of organization were reserved for the lucky and few.

Before 1859, all the unions seem to have been purely local, except for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (*ASE*), a British union that established its first Canadian branch in Montreal in 1853, a second in Hamilton in 1857, and two more (*Toronto and Brantford*) in 1858. But from 1859 on, Canadian unionism became steadily more and more “**international**”; that is, more and more of its members belonged to unions with their headquarters and the bulk of their membership in another country.

The ASE was followed during the 1860's by several organizations with headquarters in the United States - such as Moulders (*1859*), the Locomotive Engineers (*1864*), the Typographical Union (*1865*), the Knights of St. Crispin [shoemakers] (*1868*) and the Cigar Makers (*1869*); the Coopers also may have arrived before 1871, the Bricklayers and Masons (*1872*), the Locomotive Firemen (*1876*), the Knights of Labor (*1879*), the Railway conductors (*1881*), the American Brotherhood of Carpenters (*1882*), the Railroad Trainmen (*1885*) and the Painters and Decorators (*1887*). British and American immigrants brought some of these unions with them; others were invited by Canadian local unions that wanted to be part of something bigger and stronger and whose members wanted to be able to move freely to jobs in the United States when times were hard in Canada. Nevertheless, during the 1860's, 1870's and 1880's, Canadian workers continued to form purely local or provincial unions.

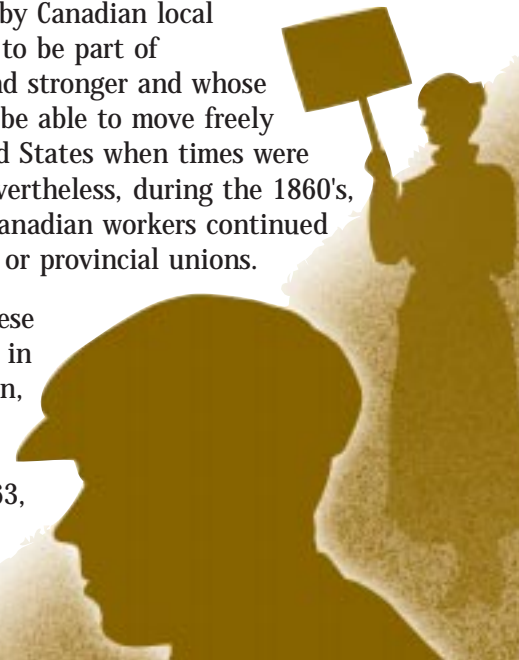
For many years these various unions, even in the same city or town, had very little to do with each other. But in December 1863, several Hamilton unions formed a



The Canada we know was not built by the politicians, soldiers and businessmen who populate our history books. Our country was built on the toil and sweat of people who cleared forests, tilled fields, built canals, railways and cities and laboured in our factories and resource industries. When we study the lives and experiences of these people, we rediscover our own roots.

If Canada could be advertised as “the best poor man's country”, it was because hard labour was often the main factor in exploiting the country's resources. The fishery and the fur trade, farming and lumbering depended on back-breaking and often dangerous work which only settlers and their families would perform. Relatively speaking, manual labour was scarce and commanded a premium. In neither the French nor the British regimes did it command social respectability or economic security. In an immigrant society, the supply of skilled workers was haphazard and undependable, raising the wage they might claim, but equally heightening the incentive for their displacement by technological innovation.

Early unions, on the wharves of Halifax, Saint John and



central Trades Union or Trades Assembly, a body made up of delegates from the constituent unions, which lasted till at least 1875. In 1871, five craft unions formed the Toronto Trades Assembly (1871-78), the Ottawa Trades Council (1872-76) and the St. Catharines Trades Assembly (1875). In 1873, moreover, the Toronto Assembly called a national convention. By that time, there must have been upwards of a hundred unions in the country but the convention had delegates from only 31 locals of 14 unions, all in Ontario (although the *Typographical Unions in Montreal and Quebec sent letters of approval*). This convention set up the first national central organization, the Canadian Labour Union, which met again in 1874, 1875, 1876 and 1877. The depression of the 1870's, however, was fatal to both the local and national central bodies, although many of the local unions, especially the branches of the internationals, survived.

Another start was made in 1883 and three years later this organization became the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLC), which was one of the forerunners of the present Canadian Labour Congress, now the major national labour organization in Canada. What are now known as Labour councils were cropping up in various areas, bringing together the unions in a particular community. At a later stage, provincial Federations of Labour were formed, performing the same function on a provincial level.

Meanwhile, the infant Canadian labour movement had won a resounding and decisive legislative victory in the Toronto printers' strike of 1872, part of the nine-hours movement. Most of the Toronto master-printers, headed by George Brown of the Globe, were fiercely anti-union. They had 13 leading members of the Typographical Union committee arrested on a charge of seditious conspiracy. Labour had assumed unions were lawful but it now found they were not. British Acts freeing them of their Common Law disabilities did not extend to Canada so that Ontario unions in 1872 were in the same legal position as British unions in 1791. They promptly set to work to get Canadian legislation to match the British. Sir John A. MacDonald, delighted at the opportunity to "**dish the Liberals**" with two pieces of legislation, lost no time in passing through the Dominion Parliament a Trade Unions Act and a Criminal Law Amendment Act (1872) modelled on the British Acts of the previous year. This was the first big piece of successful political action by Canadian unions. The prosecution was dropped and the strike was won.

With the adoption of the National Policy (1879) and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1881-85), Canadian industry began to revive and grow and the unions revived and grew with it. Some of these early unions were principally craft unions which were not interested in rocking the boat in any terms of social change. They adjusted themselves to the status quo. They were what

are called today "**bread-and-butter unions**".

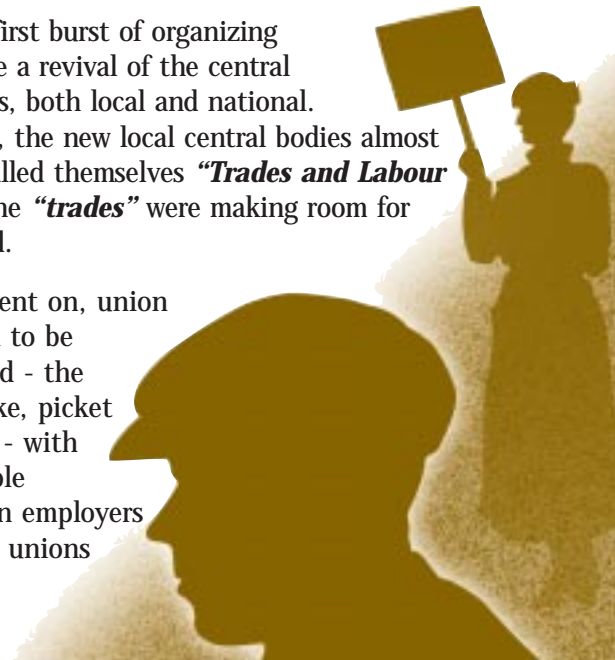
But there were also differences among some of these small Canadian unions. At no time were all Canadian trade unionists concerned with "**bread-and-butter**" or "**business**" unionism to the exclusion of an active interest in progressive social policies which would benefit the community as a whole, or of support for a political party which would give priority to such policies. Small as they were in the early days, Canadian unions were in the forefront of the battle for social benefits such as old age pensions and unemployment insurance.

But the most spectacular feature of the 1880's was the appearance and the growth of the Knights of Labor. Actually, the Knights (which started in the United States but spread to Canada, Britain, Belgium, Australia and New Zealand) began in Hamilton in the fall of 1881. Within a decade they had organized well over 300 Local Assemblies in more than 100 cities, towns and villages in every province except Prince Edward Island and what is now Saskatchewan. Many of these were short-lived, few surviving the turn of the century, but by 1887 there must have been close to 200.

What is more, the Knights were mainly responsible for the organization of the unskilled, men and women (of which there had previously been very little) and of small town workers. Nor did they neglect the skilled. Their first big effort in Canada was organizing 30 Local Assemblies of telegraphers, from Winnipeg to North Sydney, as part of their "**National Trade District 45, United Telegraphers of North America**". This body, in the summer of 1883, conducted the one genuinely international strike in North American history, against the big telegraph companies on both sides of the border. The strike failed and the Canadian Telegraphers' Assemblies disappeared but the Knights went on to organize almost every conceivable craft, from carpenters to watchcase makers, from stonecutters to musicians.

With the first burst of organizing activity came a revival of the central organizations, both local and national. Significantly, the new local central bodies almost invariably called themselves "**Trades and Labour Councils**"; the "**trades**" were making room for the unskilled.

As time went on, union rights began to be circumscribed - the right to strike, picket and boycott - with no comparable obligation on employers to recognize unions



or bargain with them. Unions had little or no protection against offensive or retaliatory actions by employers, such as firing or blacklisting union members and hiring strikebreakers.

Between 1901 and 1913 workers were involved in 14 large strikes across Canada in which violence in some form occurred. In 11 of those strikes, the militia or regular military forces were used. The law placed a higher priority on property rights and right of an employer to carry on operations without interference than it did on the rights of workers to organize for collective bargaining and to protect their jobs.

In addition to strikebreakers, employers were allowed to hire special armed guards, supplementing regular police, to protect their property. Often local and provincial authorities read the Riot Act or proclaimed Martial Law, banned public meetings and brought in militia or regular units of the army.

Meanwhile the Trades and Labor Congress was made up overwhelmingly of international unions and never faltered in its allegiance to international unionism. By 1902, it had thrown out all organizations “dual to” (rivals of) TLC unions, including the Knights of Labor. The TLC knew that, in most industries, international unions had the staff, experience and money to do the job that had to be done.

The unions expelled by the TLC in 1902 promptly formed the National Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, which, in 1908, became the Canadian Federation of Labour and in 1910 took in the Provincial Workmen’s Association of Nova Scotia (which has never affiliated with the TLC). In 1919, just after the Winnipeg general strike and partly as a result of its failure, many western unionists, attracted by revolutionary industrial unionism, broke away from the TLC and the established international unions and formed the One Big Union (OBU), which for a time threatened to take away a large proportion of the TLC’s membership on the Prairies and in British Columbia. Though the OBU petered out, its existence pointed to the inadequacy of the TLC structure to meet the needs of growing numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in new mass production industries. Between 1901 and 1921, small Roman Catholic unions (some of them perhaps former Knights of Labor Assemblies) sprang up in Quebec under the fostering care of the hierarchy and church and in 1921 formed the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour (CCCL).

In 1927, the Canadian Federation of Labour and other national unions (notably the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, which had entered the TLC in 1917 and had been expelled from it in 1921) formed the All Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL), dedicated to industrial and national unionism. By 1935, purely Canadian unions of one kind or another, including the Communist Workers’ Unity League, made up nearly half the total union membership in Canada. Two camps had now emerged. The ACCL were all-inclusive industrial unions while the TLC were in the main restricted to the skilled crafts.

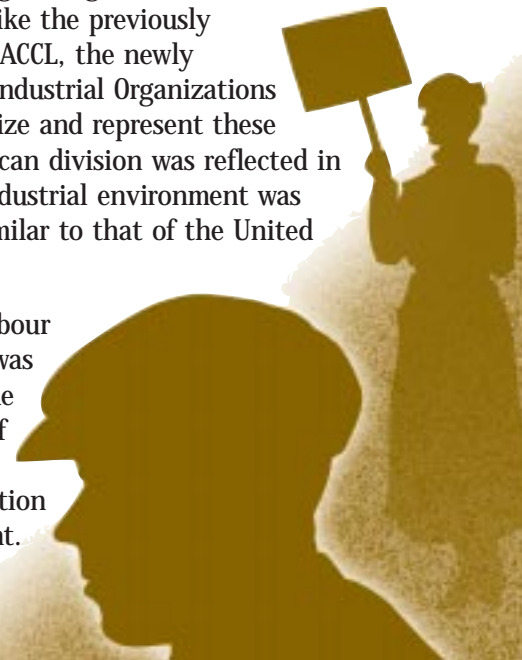


Photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives

In 1929 came the Stock market Crash and the Depression. The Depression went on for most of ten years and the ranks of the unemployed grew to record levels. Governments had little sympathy for the unemployed or strikers who were combatting rampant wage cuts and intolerable working conditions. The unemployed growing increasingly frustrated by government inaction “rode the rails” from B.C. hoping to get to Ottawa to protest the policies of the Bennett Conservative Government. The government called out the RCMP to brutally suppress the On to Ottawa Trek. Unemployed workers were shot or and sent back to relief camps. However, the seeds of protest were planted.

During this time the great debate in the United States was over the merits of organizing by industry (like General Motors) or by crafts. The workforce of unskilled workers in mass production industries was expanding rapidly and was ready to be organized. The American Federation of Labor did not believe in organizing unskilled workers into industrial unions. Like the previously mentioned OBU and ACCL, the newly formed Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) arose to organize and represent these workers. This American division was reflected in Canada where the industrial environment was changing in ways similar to that of the United States.

The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada was reluctant to expel the Canadian branches of the CIO unions but the American Federation of Labor was adamant.



Faced with a virtual ultimatum from the AFL unions (*whose Canadian membership was far larger*), it really had no choice and in 1939 the Canadian CIO unions were expelled.

Nothing had transformed the lives of working people more than unions. A series of wartime clashes, culminating in a wildcat strike of steelworkers early in 1943, together with a dramatic growth of support for the democratic socialist Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (*CCF*), won Canadian unionists what American unions had achieved under the Wagner Act of 1935. Privy Council Order 1003, known as P.C. 1003, proclaimed in February 1944, finally created the machinery necessary to enforce a worker's right to choose a union, to impose collective bargaining and a grievance procedure and to curb unfair practices by unions and management.

While some provinces had already come close to such provisions, P.C. 1003 provided an enduring basis for industrial relations in the federal and most provincial jurisdictions. It was soon reinforced at the end of 1945 by the Rand Formula, a solution to a dispute between the Ford Motor Co. and the United Auto Workers which decreed that if a worker made union wages and enjoyed union benefits, they had to pay dues. By imposing a form of agency shop, Mr. Justice Ivan Rand gave a powerful impetus to a compromise solution on the issue of union security.

The postwar union pattern was further established by a series of strikes in 1946 and 1947. With booming markets, even powerfully anti-union corporations concluded that compromise was preferable when markets were suddenly so good. In turn, union wage scales (and their reflection in non-union areas) helped expand the economy. By the 1950's, almost a third of Canadian workers were unionized, covering almost all the resource and manufacturing industries. Non-union firms had to match wages and conditions in unionized competitors in order to keep their workers.

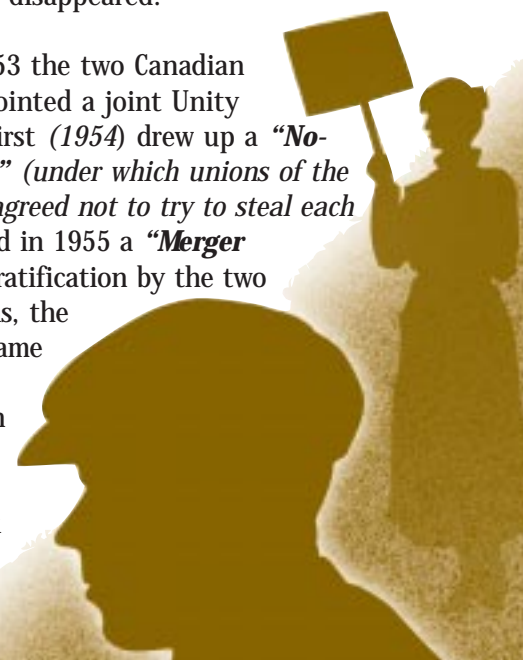
Despite stumbles in 1949, Canadians could easily believe that their prosperity was permanent. Pensions and health insurance plans became as routine as ownership of a home, a car and even a cottage and a boat.

Certainly unions experienced long strikes but the violence of earlier years was rare, and defeats, such as Murdochville in 1957 or the Newfoundland Loggers' strike of 1959, were unusual and often avenged by subsequent victory.

On the organizational side, the first step toward unity among unions, paradoxically, created the first effective opposition to the TLC. The ACCL and the expelled Canadian CIO Committee agreed to unite into the Canadian Congress of Labour (*CCL*), which was set up in 1940 with complete autonomy not only for itself but for the Canadian branches of CIO unions. Contrary to most expectations, this new Congress not only survived but grew and became strong, organizing mass production industries and pioneering in labour research, workers' education and labour public relations.

For the next 15 years both the TCL and CCL passed resolutions almost every year in favour of unity and, from 1948 on, joint action on various matters became increasingly common. But as long as the two American central bodies were at loggerheads their Canadian counterparts could make little progress towards reunion because of the provisions of the TLC Constitution which, in effect, forbade it to affiliate any union "dual" to an AFL union. Once the Americans agreed to discuss unity, this blockage disappeared.

By the end of 1953 the two Canadian Congresses had appointed a joint Unity Committee, which first (*1954*) drew up a "**No-raiding Agreement**" (under which unions of the rival organizations agreed not to try to steal each others' members) and in 1955 a "**Merger Agreement**". After ratification by the two Congress conventions, the Merger Agreement came into force and the founding convention of the united Canadian Labour Congress (*CLC*) took place in April 1956.



Historically, political action has always been one of the most important subjects facing the Canadian labour movement. The reform of provincial labour laws was a top priority and some early unions viewed political action as a means to rectify these problems. Some unions, however, did not hold this view and many of the deep splits within the central labour bodies over the years can be attributed in part to differing union philosophies and political action.

In 1956, the Canadian Labour Congress, at its first convention, adopted a compromise policy on political action between its CCL and TLC factions, leaving its provincial federation, its local councils and, of course, its autonomous affiliated unions free to follow whatever line they saw fit. It also authorized its Political Education Committee to initiate discussions with other free trade unions, the principal farm organizations, the co-operative movement, the CCF and "other parties pledged to support the legislative programme" of the Congress, in order **"to explore and develop co-ordination of action in the legislative and political field"**.

Nothing much came of this until after the General Election of 1958, when the Congress invited the same groups to enter discussions looking to the formation of a new political party. The farm organizations and the co-operatives (*mainly farmer*) declined; but the CCF accepted. In 1961, the CLC and the CCF, with a variety of sympathizers, organized in **"New Party Clubs"** and funded the New Democratic Party.

The Congress did not itself affiliate with the new party (*although a number of its unions, with some 200,000 members, did*). It remains an independent national trade union centre. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that the founding of the New Democratic party represents the triumph of the British tradition of direct political action brought to Canada by British working-class immigrants over the non-partisan AFL tradition. It is one of the marks of the independence of the Canadian labour movement from the American.

By 1979, CLC and affiliate union support (*mainly from the old CCL unions*) gave greater commitment and resources to the NDP. This did not sit well with the vestiges of the craft unions whose political action philosophy mirrored the American trade union vision of political action which is not ideologically based. This schism was one of the deep-rooted reasons which led to the conflict and expulsion of the building trades (*crafts*) from the CLC in the early 1980's.

The history of unionism is a triumph for working

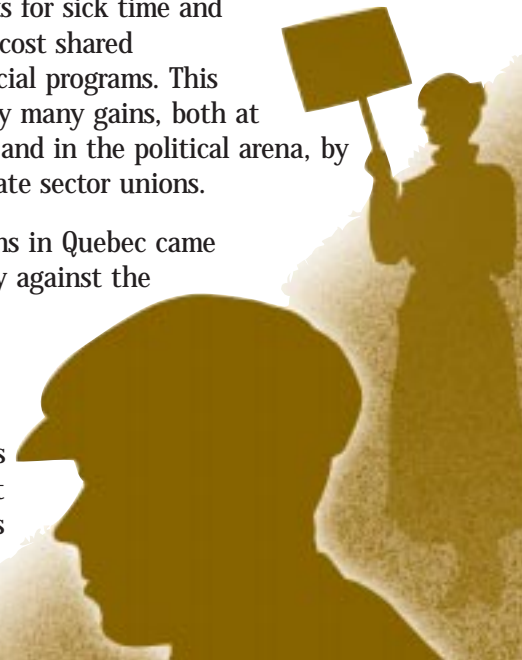
people. In 1911 there were only 133,000 union members in Canada and at the outbreak of the First World War, still only 166,000. By 1919, the number had more than doubled to 378,000; by 1924, it had sunk to 261,000, and by 1932, it had recovered to 322,000. The Depression cut it back to 281,000, but by 1938, it was slightly higher than in 1919. During the Second World War, the immense new industrial development and the organization of the mass production industries again more than doubled the pre-war figure, and in 1949 membership passed the 1,000,000-mark. From 1958 to 1964, total union membership was almost stationary; but in 1965, it started to rise again substantially. This period saw the unionization of most of the public sector government workers at the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government and significantly expanded the ranks of the trade union movement. Many of these new members were women who faced major inequities in pay and working conditions.

These problems led to a huge increase in the number of work stoppages. By 1969, the record for industrial conflict was broken as government statistics reported that almost eight million person-days were lost in work stoppages. The main issue in most of them was money, as workers tried to make up for diminished purchasing power and to cover anticipated price rises and galloping inflation.

As well, governments also began to impose back-to-work legislation, compulsory arbitration and other strangling legislation on its employees in a bid to control any further growth and influence of its public sector unions.

This era also brought a major expansion of Canada's social welfare programs with the implementation of a nation wide medicare program, Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Income Security, improved Unemployment Insurance benefits that now included benefits for sick time and maternity leave and cost shared provincial/federal social programs. This period was marked by many gains, both at the bargaining table and in the political arena, by both public and private sector unions.

In 1972, the unions in Quebec came together in solidarity against the Bourassa Liberal government. They formed a Common Front group that led public sector workers on one of the largest province wide strikes ever seen. It was



ended after the government imposed legislation, injunctions and fines on the unions and jail terms for some of the leadership when these measures were defied by the workers. In most cases, the unions' contract demands were met by the government.

By the mid 1970's, both the political climate and the economy had changed dramatically. Unions were increasingly militant in their demands and in protecting rights already won at the bargaining table. There were a number of significant strikes and protests during this period beginning with the Fleck and Inco strikes in Ontario. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (*CUPW*) were threatened with back to work legislation before they went on strike and their leader Jean-Claude Parrot was jailed for refusing to order his members back to work. Government attacks continued, as provincial and federal governments were determined to limit the scope of unions' power at the bargaining table. The Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau introduced wage and price controls as a way of fighting rising inflation rates and this angered workers. This was a historic step by the federal government because it imposed limits on unions' abilities to negotiate wages. This intrusion by the government was a fundamental interference in the rights of workers and undercut free collective bargaining. As well, price controls were not as effective as wage controls and this further angered workers.

In response, on October 14, 1976, the CLC led Canada's first national day of protest against wage and price controls and the Trudeau government. Wage and price controls were lifted in 1978, but workers had lost much earning power during this period. However, the labour movement was to fundamentally change its approach to influencing the government from this time onward by being involved more in political action, both electorally and in broader social movements.

In the 1980's, there were several significant actions taken by different unions. Federal government clerks represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (*PSAC*) were mostly women and very poorly paid. The government would not recognize the systemic inequalities in pay and conditions for women and the clerks went on strike in 1980. This strike was one of many that focused on pay and benefit inequities faced by women workers. This became a major issue for unions and the women's movement in the coming years. In several other disputes, the United Autoworkers (*UAW*) members occupied the Houdaille (*Oshawa*) and Benedix (*Windsor*) plants as management had decided to close them. Although the Houdaille plant still closed, the workers were able to increase their severance and pensions payouts. These disputes prompted the provincial government in Ontario and other provinces to legislate better severance pay

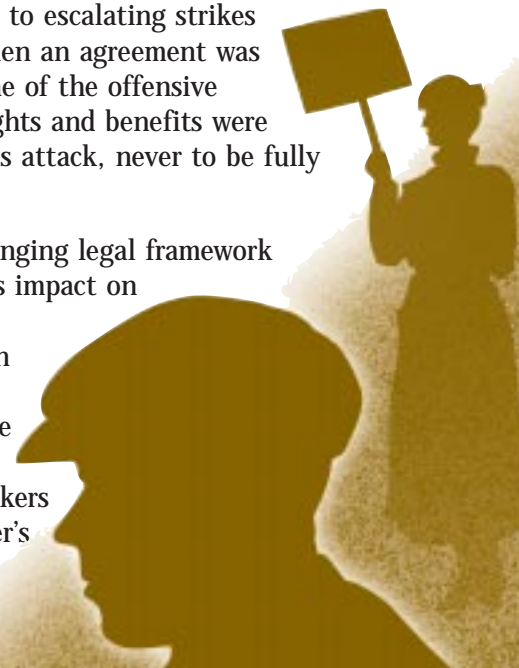
protection for workers facing plant closures.

By 1981 the Canadian economy was in a recession and suffered from very high interest and inflation rates. On November 21, 1981, the CLC led the largest labour rally in Canadian history, to protest the government's monetary policy. Unions took the position that they would not pay for the bad economic policies of the federal government and refused to accept concessions. There was a deliberate attack and scapegoating of unions by governments and the business community. This attack was carried out in several ways.

Right wing provincial governments across the country brought in legislation that restricted or denied workers the right to strike or bargain fairly. In 1982, the federal government continued its interference in collective bargaining and brought in legislation that restricted wage increases to 6 and 5 percent per year respectively. Most provincial governments implemented similar forms of legislation and this pattern was followed by employers as well. In response, there was a high degree of militancy amongst members and many strikes took place.

In 1983, the right wing Social Credit government of B.C.'s Bill Bennett introduced 26 regressive bills that aggressively attacked workers' rights, human and social rights and made major cuts to existing education and social standards. The labour movement and community groups came together in massive demonstrations and one day protests leading to escalating strikes that were halted when an agreement was reached to drop some of the offensive legislation. Many rights and benefits were taken away with this attack, never to be fully restored.

By 1985, the changing legal framework was having a serious impact on unions' abilities to organize and bargain collectively. In Edmonton, the strike by the United Food and Commercial Workers (*UFCW*) at the Gainer's meat processing



plant was a long and bitter strike and saw the use of strikebreakers, injunctions and police to try and break the union, tactics that ultimately proved unsuccessful. This was largely due to the mobilization of the Alberta labour movement which organized a successful province wide campaign to reform the labour law. As well, the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) and the CLC organized a national boycott of Gainer's meat products which helped force the company to back down.

At the same time, organizing drives to unionize workers at Eaton's, Simpson Sears and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce were successful. These drives had public campaigns as part of their strategy to increase public

support and pressure these large employers who fought hard against these workers. This was a significant breakthrough for unions into the largely unorganized retail and service sector that was always difficult to organize. Ultimately these successes could not be maintained or expanded, but they were a starting point for unions in these sectors.

This was also the beginning of a period where Canadian unions won more autonomy from international unions. Canadian sections of

international unions had a very different social and political history from their U.S. counterparts. In recent bargaining, Canadian trade unions had, by and large, resisted concessions and taken a different approach at the bargaining table than the one taken by their U.S. union brothers and sisters.

As a result, the Canadian Autoworkers Union (CAW) was formed in a split from their international United Autoworkers Union. The Canadian Paperworkers Union (CPU) had made an earlier break in 1974. The Energy and Chemical Workers Union (ECWU) and International Woodworkers Union (IWA) both made similar moves. For unions that remained international, their Canadian sections gained more political autonomy and the right to make more "made in Canada" decisions for their members. The CLC also constitutionally adopted codes of citizenship and ethical practices to ensure that unions affiliated to the CLC conducted their affairs democratically.

With the repatriation of Canada's Constitution and introduction of the Charter of Rights, the court system now had new powers to make decisions dramatically

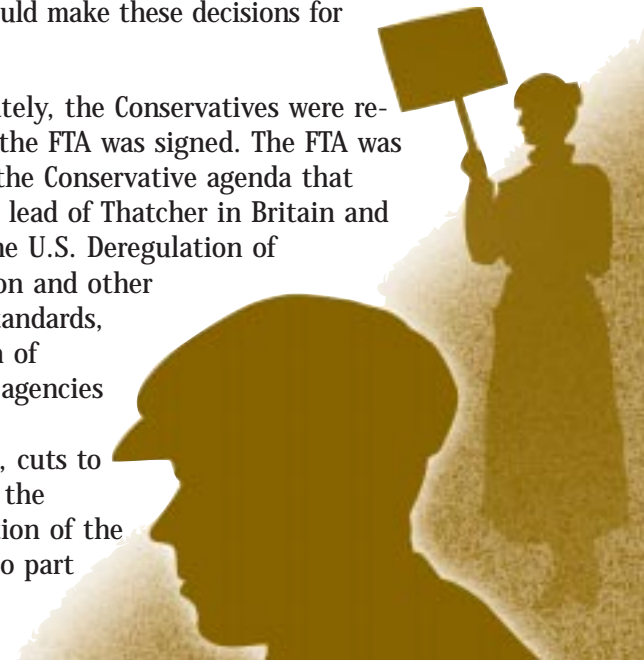
affecting workers. Despite political promises that the right to strike and collectively bargain were covered by the Charter's "**freedom of association**" clause, the Supreme Court of Canada in a series of decisions, decided that these provisions were not guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and could be limited by the courts and governments.

In these regressive times for unions, these decisions led the way for courts, governments and employers to restrict the power of unions to act on behalf of their members. Another decision by the Supreme Court, called the Lavigne decision, upheld the rights of unions to democratically decide how to spend their dues monies, specifically in this case, for political purposes. All of these decisions signaled to unions that they could not necessarily count on the legal system to uphold their rights and that the mobilizing of their members and continued political work was more necessary than ever.

By 1987, the Mulroney Conservative government started negotiations with the United States for the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Many social groups across the country were alarmed at the proposed terms of the agreement which restricted the rights of Canadian provincial and federal governments to make decisions based on national interests. The agreement would make it easier for corporations to make their profits, but at the expense of the Canada's social, economic, cultural and environmental standards and our Canadian way of life. Many groups came together in coalition to fight this agreement and it became a major issue in the 1988 election.

Unions recognized that this agreement would open the door to lower labour standards in wages, working conditions and reduce the rights to unionize and bargain collectively. They also realized that the FTA would fundamentally take away the rights of the Canadian people to decide their future and so put many resources into this fight. This fight forced a public debate that otherwise would not have occurred and forced Canadians to answer the question: "What kind of society do we want to live in and who should make these decisions for Canadians?"

Unfortunately, the Conservatives were re-elected and the FTA was signed. The FTA was one part of the Conservative agenda that followed the lead of Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the U.S. Deregulation of transportation and other important standards, privatization of government agencies and crown corporations, cuts to Via Rail and the implementation of the GST were also part



of their agenda. Major cuts to transfer payments to the provinces in education, health and social benefits resulted in significant reductions in service and the loss of many jobs. Major strikes by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (*CUPW*), in 1987 and in 1991, and by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (*PSAC*) in 1991, reflected the actions taken by the government against public sector workers and the loss of many full-time jobs into part-time and contract or casual work.

In private sector bargaining, employers used the FTA to threaten workers with plant closures unless they accepted concessions. Four years after the FTA was signed, hundreds of manufacturing plants had closed and thousands of jobs had been lost as this work was moved by corporations to the southern U.S. or Mexico where labour was poorly paid and environmental regulations minimal. The FTA was followed in 1994 with the North American Free Trade Agreement (*NAFTA*) which further opened doors for corporate trade interests in Canada, U.S. and Mexico.

Labour's response to this right-wing corporate agenda was to campaign against these Conservative policies and develop its own alternatives. The CLC, with its social allies, led many campaigns fighting privatization, cuts to Via Rail, the erosion of medicare, the GST, cuts to education and social benefits, reductions in Unemployment Insurance and the de-indexing of pension benefits. On May 15, 1993, the CLC held a large demonstration to demand decent jobs as the Conservatives continued to ignore the highest levels of unemployment in Canada since the Depression. This demonstration became the flashpoint for the defeat of the Mulroney Conservative government in the 1993 federal election.

The membership of the labour movement and the workforce was changing. The labour movement had been working internally over the last decade to open up its internal democracy and activities to include more women, people of colour, First Nations members, gays and lesbians, workers with disabilities, retired members and young members. The CLC, the federations of labour and many affiliate unions created seats on their governing councils for representation of these members. Committees, caucuses, conferences, and schools were organized at most levels where these workers could strategize and voice their issues. The different issues raised and the new forms of union activism demonstrated by these members brought new strength and diversity to the movement.

Labour was also expanding and strengthening its links to social and coalition partners, both within Canada and around the world. As an example, in 1996, the CLC joined with the National Action Committee on the Status for Women (*NAC*) in a country wide Women's March Against Poverty. The march brought women's and labour activists

together across the country in their communities highlighting the themes of jobs and justice.

The CLC had also been working at the international level with unions and social groups in the Asia-Pacific and Latin American regions lobbying for fair trade rules and social clauses in trade agreements that support reasonable labour, social and environmental standards. The CLC also continued to grow with the building trades unions, Teamsters, teachers and nurses becoming members of the CLC.

The growth of trade unions as an institution and force in society has benefited the lives and dignity of workers. But the interests of organized labour are not restricted to just conditions of employment and working conditions. Canadian unions have been in the forefront, and continue to be, in the fight for better health care, education, housing, pensions and human rights. All Canadians have benefited from the efforts of the founders and builders of Canadian labour unions.

The debates and the issues have never been clearer. Workers' and citizens' interests are not corporate interests. What governments are forced to provide as legal and social rights for workers and citizens can be taken away when governments adopt right wing policies. The fight for social, economic and political justice has never been more necessary. This fight matters not just to our own communities and country, but to the global society we're creating today. Will we have fair labour, social and environmental standards and make sure that the wealth of our world is shared equally? In order to achieve this vision, unions must continue their fight. We can learn much from our labour history and use these lessons to build our future.



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by Armand Roy

